



Town of Rowe  
**Board of Selectmen** Minutes  
Thursday April 14, 2020 –6:30 p.m.  
VIA TELECONFERENCE

*This meeting will be held via video conference, consistent with Gov. Baker's temporary modifications to Open Meeting Law.*

**REMOTE PARTICIPATION INFORMATION:**

Video and/or audio

Meeting Host: zoom.us

Meeting ID: 288-065-7034

URL: <https://zoom.us/j/2880657034>

Telephone: 312-626-6799

**Present:** Chair Chuck Sokol, Ed Silva, Selectman and Executive Secretary Janice Boudreau

**Absent:** Vice-Chair Jennifer Morse

Finance Committee: Paul McLatchy III, Loretta Dionne, C. Selmi Hyytinen, Laurie Pike

Fire Chief Dennis Annear, School Superintendent Jonathan Franzoni, School Principal William Knittle, School

Business Manager Jennifer Macksey

**Audience:** Joanne Semanie

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by Chair Sokol at 6:30 p.m. via remote participation.

**MOTION: Roll call vote to call to order:**

**Chair Sokol:** yes

**Selectman Silva:** yes

**Vice-Chair Morse:** absent

Announcement of recording devices: two

**Selectboard Business**

**Fire Department Personnel:** Chair Annear attended the meeting to discuss his proposal for a new position on the fire department. This person would involve someone working sixteen scheduled hours a week to provide more coverage during the day when most department members and first responders are at work. Vice-Chair Dionne inquired as to whether this person will be scheduled around police officers, who already respond to medical calls during their shifts. Chief Annear answered that this person would be scheduled so as to not overlap. While this person would not be considered a shared employee, he is also hoping that Charlemont will employ this individual for a further sixteen hours a week. This would allow for some overlap between the two towns.

Vice-Chair Dionne asked about when most of the calls come in, but Chief Annear was unable to provide that information at this time. He explained that in addition to providing coverage, he also envisioned this person as a potential successor when he retires in three years. The current deputy chief (who used to be the chief) has told Chief Annear that he has no interest in returning to that role. Chair Sokol requested a

breakdown of the current officers and firefighters, including the time/costs put in and their area(s) of responsibility. Chief Annear will provide this.

Vice-Chair Dionne expressed concerns about finding someone willing to work 32 hours a week (sixteen for both Rowe and Charlemont) without receiving benefits. Mr. McLatchy opined that if there was a goal of cross-coverage (responding to a Rowe call while stationed in Charlemont, for example), it might be slightly skewed due to Charlemont having a population 3-4 times that of Rowe.

**Joined the Meeting:** School Superintendent Jonathan Franzoni, School Business Manager Jennifer Macksey joined the meeting at 6:55 p.m. School Principal William Knittle joined the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

**Left the Meeting:** Chief Annear was thanked for attending, and left the meeting at 7:07 p.m.

**School:** Superintendent Franzoni began by explaining that the news has not been very good on the state level in regards to the budget. Due to the COVID-19 situation, the state is estimating between \$3-\$5 billion in lost revenue. This could mean that state funding through rural aid and Chapter 70 might be drastically reduced. Rowe's FY20 Chapter 70 funds are approximately \$140,000, and the rural aid is roughly \$6,000. While not *all* of that will disappear, it's difficult to project what amount the town will receive. Ms. Pike asked if state support is lost, will the budget get redone. Ms. Macksey said that it would be up to the town, as the Chapter 70 money goes directly to the town and is not part of the school's actual budget.

Selectman Silva asked how many students there are in the school, including preschool. Principal Knittle replied that there are 26 Rowe students and 46 choice/preschool students for a total of 72. Preschool students aren't covered under school choice, but some revenue is still received. There are currently four Rowe preschoolers and five from other towns. These numbers mean that Rowe spends approximately \$19,700 per student without factoring in school choice and grants, and \$14,624 after choice/grants.

The school central office has taken a new approach to presenting the budget. In years past lines that would be paid for using choice funds were simply reduced by the amount that would be paid from that revolving account. Moving forward, they are showing all costs and subtracting choice/grant funding at the end. This will give a better picture of the actual costs to educate, but makes comparing FY20 and FY21 budget lines very difficult. As Superintendent Franzoni and Business Manager Macksey were not involved in the previous year's budget, it's not 100% clear where the increases lie. Members were appreciative of this new approach to budgeting, but a great deal of discussion revolved around where a difference of roughly \$178,000 came from over the current year as it couldn't be easily identified. School administration will look into this and see if they can find out anything further.

Mr. McLatchy said he would like to see more long-range financial planning for the school, perhaps involving the Board of Selectmen and/or Finance Committee. Superintendent Franzoni replied that the state is not supporting these smaller schools as they should be, which places greater burdens on the towns.

Discussion followed about the concept of a school in general for the town. As of now, there is a ratio of approximately 10.4 students for each teacher, not counting aides. Members were asked by the superintendent what they thought was an appropriate "cut off" point for number of Rowe kids, but no one had a clear answer.

A point was made by Mr. McLatchy about how the school is a sensitive topic in town, where people who question finances and the overall cost often get backlash and labeled as anti-school. Members discussed how to improve transparency and efficiency while still providing quality education.

A request was made by Mr. McLatchy to see the breakdown of what areas a retiring teacher is responsible for, and to see if that could somehow be rearranged amongst existing staff rather than hiring a new full-time person. Vice-Chair Dionne said she couldn't support cutting a teaching position at this time. Ms. Pike felt that a better phrasing might be to see if there is a way to be more efficient with staffing needs.

**Left the Meeting:** Vice-Chair of the Finance Committee Loretta Dionne left the meeting at 8:51 p.m.

Time was spent going over the requests from the Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen, and a timeline for following up. Members will try to meet with school officials during the first few weeks of May.

**Next Meeting:** The Committee will meet at 6:30 on April 21<sup>st</sup> to review special/capital projects and any remaining lines not yet addressed. Until further notice, these meetings will be held remotely.

**Adjournment:**

**MOTION: Chair Sokol made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:17 p.m. The motion was seconded by Selectman Silva.**

**A roll call vote was taken:**

**Chair Sokol:**                      **yes**

**Selectman Silva:**                **yes**

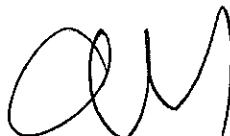
**Vice-Chair Morse:**            **absent**

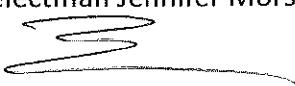
Respectfully Submitted,

Janice Boudreau, Executive Secretary

Approval Date:    April 23, 2020

Approved:

  
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Chuck Sokol, Chair

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Selectman Jennifer Morse, Vice-Chair  
  
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Selectman Ed Silva

**Documents:**

1. Agenda 04/14/20
2. Per Diem Firefighter Position
3. FY21 Rowe School Budget
4. FY21 Rowe Budget Salaries